

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

For NPS use only

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

received

date entered

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*  
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

**1. Name**

historic Indiana Avenue Historic District

and/or common 500 Block of Indiana Avenue

**2. Location**

street & number 500 Block Indiana Avenue (See Continuation Sheet) N/A not for publication

city, town Indianapolis N/A vicinity of

state Indiana code 018 county Marion code 097

**3. Classification**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Ownership</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Present Use</b>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
	<u>N/A</u>	<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input type="checkbox"/> museum
			<input type="checkbox"/> park
			<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
			<input type="checkbox"/> religious
			<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
			<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input type="checkbox"/> other:

**4. Owner of Property**

name Multiple owners (See continuation sheet)

street & number

city, town \_\_\_\_\_ vicinity of \_\_\_\_\_ state \_\_\_\_\_

**5. Location of Legal Description**

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Recorder's Office

street & number City-County Building

city, town Indianapolis state Indiana 46204

**6. Representation in Existing Surveys**

title Midtown Survey of Regional Center has this property been determined eligible? ☐ yes ☐ no

date March-May, 1985 ☐ federal ☐ state ☐ county ☒ local

depository for survey records Indiana Division of Historic Preservation and Archaeology

city, town Indianapolis state Indiana

## 7. Description

Condition  
☐ excellent  
☒ good  
☒ fair

☒ deteriorated  
☐ ruins  
☐ unexposed

Check one  
☐ unaltered  
☒ altered

Check one  
☒ original site  
☐ moved date \_\_\_\_\_

### Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The 500 block of Indiana Avenue is located between West Street, North Street, Michigan Street, and the Central Canal. The Avenue is one of the four original diagonal streets laid out in the 1821 city plan, therefore it slices the rectangular block bounded by the above named streets from northwest to southeast. Like the streets forming the boundary of the block, Indiana Avenue is 90 feet wide. The asphalt paved right-of-way is flanked by wide concrete sidewalks on both sides (photo 3). The topography of the 500 block is flat, rising slightly only where the avenue bridges the canal.

To the northwest of the district is the Madame C. J. Walker Theatre at 617 Indiana Avenue, listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1980. The theatre, located at the intersection of North Street, West Street, and Indiana Avenue, serves as a focal point to the north (photo 3). The modern AUL Building, several blocks to the south, serves as a focus in that direction (photo 4).

Extensive redevelopment in the area around the 500 block has left those blocks to the north, south and east of the boundaries without significant architecture. The 400 block of the avenue, once famous for its jazz clubs, now contains only two 20th century commercial structures (photo 4). West Street, North Street (photo 5), and Michigan Street are now characterized by vacant lots. Michigan Street maintains a few late 19th century and early 20th century houses. The Central Canal on the east is currently undergoing renovation which will widen and deepen it. Just east of the canal is the historic Kuhn House (photo 6) moved to its present location in 1984 from 413 West Michigan Street to spare it from demolition.

Of the 12 remaining structures in this nomination, 11 are rated contributing and one is rated non-contributing. Only four of the 12 buildings are 20th century (502-504 Indiana Avenue, 1910; 541-543 Indiana Avenue, 1912; 523 Indiana Avenue, 1910; and 439 North Street, c. 1920). The remaining structures range in construction date from 1870 to 1899.

Three of the 12 buildings within the district are Italianate in style. The remaining buildings are either 19th or 20th century functional structures. All of the buildings are brick; however, 506-508 Indiana Avenue has had its original facade covered with Lustron panels and metal security wall.

The oldest buildings on the block are 522-526 (c. 1869), 525-527 (c. 1870), and 535 (c. 1871). Previous to July, 1986, 501 Indiana Avenue, built in 1866, existed as the oldest building on the block (photo 7). The City of Indianapolis demolished the building to accommodate plans for the renovation of the Central Canal.

The building at 522-526 Indiana Avenue (photo 8) is a good example of Italianate commercial architecture. Constructed of red brick, it is two stories in height. The seven round-arched second floor windows are grouped in units of two and five over three storefronts and a round-arched entrance. Two of the storefronts have been boarded up while the easternmost has been filled in with block and two small frame windows. The second floor openings all have limestone keystones and springers. Only one opening has its complete original sash in place; the rest have been partially boarded. The cornice is separated from the lower wall by a dentil molding. Attic vents, most with their original ornate grills, are separated by six heavy Italianate brackets that support the overhanging tin cornice.

## 8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400–1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500–1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600–1699	<input type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700–1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800–1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900–	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other (specify) Ethnic culture

Specific dates 1869–1935 Builder/Architect Various

### Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Indiana Avenue Historic District is significant because it contains the city's only evidence of the once-thriving commercial activity that primarily served the black community of Indianapolis. Businesses along the avenue, particularly the 400 and 500 blocks, provided food, housing, entertainment, consumer services and, most importantly, a sense of identity for black residents. The buildings in the 500 block (the district), although in deteriorated condition, once housed and, in some cases, still house those businesses. They are the only surviving physical evidence of a commercial sector solidly associated with black history in Indianapolis. These structures are an important thread of continuity with the cultural contributions made by blacks to the city throughout the early years of the 20th century.

The avenue also is important documentation of the city's original plan. Laid out in 1821 by Alexander Ralston, the plan had four diagonal streets intersecting the regular rectangular grid and serving the four quadrants of the city. Indiana Avenue was designated to serve, and still does serve, the northwest part of the midtown area of Indianapolis. The impact of placing diagonals over the grid is reflected architecturally at the intersections of the two street systems where triangular building lots resulted. A number of flat iron buildings were constructed conforming to the lot shapes. Some of these have been lost but the 500 block of Indiana Avenue has two good examples. The structure at 547–551 Indiana Avenue is an example of the adaptation of historical motifs to this building form while the building at 502–504 demonstrates a more straightforward, functional design approach with only limited historical references.

Early settlers to Indianapolis generally avoided the Indiana Avenue area because of its proximity to the White River. The river, they believed, bred the Malaria-infected mosquitos responsible for the death of one-eighth of the city's population in 1921.<sup>1</sup> Because of its abundance of inexpensive, unsettled land the Indiana Avenue area became a natural draw for poor immigrants and low-income members of the work force. Hardworking, lower-class immigrants are characteristic of the early settlers to the area. Though city directories indicate some block settlers occupied this area as early as the 1860s, their population increased during the 1880s as freed slaves moved to Indianapolis from North Carolina.<sup>2</sup> By 1900 blacks constituted one-fifth of Indiana Avenue's population.<sup>3</sup>

The earliest businesses in the 500 block of Indiana Avenue catered to the needs of the immigrant community. Such names as S. J. Affenstranger, Andrew Denk, Bernhard and William Waller, Eliza Cussens, and John Burks provided such services as grocer, shoemaker, tailor, and dry goods merchant throughout the 1860s and 70s. As early as 1865, two black-operated businesses occupied the 500 block of Indiana Avenue. Samuel G. Smothers operated a grocery store at 515 Indiana Avenue (demolished), and William Franklin, a peddler, occupied 511 Indiana Avenue (demolished).

The black population continued to increase along the 500 block of the Avenue. Throughout the late 19th and into the 20th centuries black businessmen worked side-by-side with their white counterparts. The shopowners in the 500 block represented a fully racially integrated district, although the clientele was progressing toward predominantly black.

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

Please see continuation sheet

## 10. Geographical Data

**Acreage of nominated property** Approximately 3 acres

Quadrangle name Indianapolis West

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

## UTM References

	Zone	Easting	Northing
A			
C			
E			
G			

	Zone	Easting	Northings
B			
D			
F			
H			

### Verbal boundary description and justification

Please see continuation sheet

**List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries**

state	code	county	code
N/A			

state	code	county	code
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**11. Form Prepared By**

F. Eric Utz, Director, Indianapolis Regional Office  
name/title Suzanne T. Rollins, Preservation Historian; William Gulde, Intern

Historic Landmarks Foundation

organization	of Indiana	date	August 22, 1986
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**street & number** 1028 North Delaware

telephone 317/638-5264

city or town Indianapolis

state Indiana 46202

## 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

**The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:**

national \_\_\_\_\_ state X local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature *Robert Hantley for J. M. Pedersen*

title Indiana State Historic Preservation Officer

date May 6, 1981

**For NPS use only**

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

date

**Keeper of the National Register**

**Attest:**

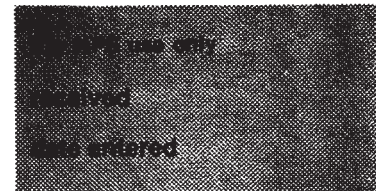
**date**

### Chief of Registration



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Item number

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Page 1

Indiana Avenue Addresses

North Side

551  
547  
545  
541  
543  
539  
535  
537  
527  
525  
523

South Side

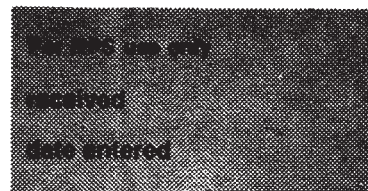
530  
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526  
522  
508]  
506] non-contributing  
504  
502

- North Street Addresses

437  
439

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Continuation sheet	Indiana Avenue Historic District	Item number	4	Page	2
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Number corresponds to hex number on map labeled Square 10

- 2) Indianapolis--Department of Metropolitan Development  
148 East Market Street, Suite 800  
Indianapolis, Indiana 46204
- 3) Indianapolis--Department of Metropolitan Development
- 4) Indianapolis--Department of Metropolitan Development
- 6) Carolyn Lucas Dickson  
508 West Bernhard Avenue  
Indianapolis, Indiana 46208
- 11) Benjamin Pope, Jr. and Edna Rodman Pope  
28 West McClean Place  
Indianapolis, Indiana 46202
- 12) Donald Burdsall  
157 E. Hill Valley Drive  
Indianapolis, Indiana 46227
- 13) 502-504 Indiana Avenue  
Lillian and Otto Ferger  
c/o Sidney Stein  
302 N. Alabama  
Indianapolis, Indiana 46204
- Jo Ann W. Pool  
121 Woodglen Drive  
Gulfport, Mississippi 39501
- Ruby Owings  
5040 Allisonville Road  
Indianapolis, INdiana 46205
- 17) Indianapolis--Department of Metropolitan Development
- 18) Indianapolis--Department of Metropolitan Development
- 26) Indianapolis--Department of Metropolitan Development
- 27) Indianapolis--Department of Metropolitan Development
- 28) Uless and Arlene Manson  
5602 Woodside Drive  
Indianapolis, Indiana 46208
- 29) Uless and Arlene Manson

Harold Weinmann  
4010 North New Jersey Street  
Indianapolis, IN 46205

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The two-story building at 528-530 Indiana Avenue (photo 13) was constructed in 1893. It consists of two ground floor storefronts and seven rectangular window openings surmounted by bracketed wooden cornices on the second floor. The building has lost its original cornice

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The small, two-story structure at 537-539 Indiana Avenue, constructed c. 1885, is also an example of 19th century functional architecture. The building is in an advanced state of deterioration, yielding few clues as to the details of its original appearance. The building is divided into two storefronts on the ground floor, now boarded up. Four windows with no enframing detail are paired above each storefront. The building has lost its cornice and only vestiges of two small brackets remain to suggest what they might have been like.

Examples of 20th century functional architecture are provided by the buildings at 502-504, 523, and 541-543 Indiana Avenue. The building at 502-504 Indiana Avenue (photo 14) is a fine example of minimal, simplified detail adapted to a two-story commercial structure of triangular shape. Like 547-551 Indiana Avenue, this building's shape was dictated by the intersection of Michigan Street and the diagonal of Indiana Avenue. Unlike 547-551, no particular enrichment was provided for the one-bay facade facing the intersection. The building's only embellishment is a limestone cornice molding separating the first and second floors, limestone lintels and sills on the second floor windows, and an overhanging cornice. The truncated section nearest the intersection rises lightly above the rest of the structure.

The building at 541-543 Indiana Avenue (photo 15) is probably the most architecturally distinctive example of 20th century functional design in the 500 block. It was built in 1910. Unlike earlier buildings described, this structure is more horizontal in proportion. The building is two stories tall with two ground floor storefronts balanced around a central entrance. On the second floor, bands of windows correspond to the storefronts below, while a single window is located above the entrance. All openings are now boarded. Above the second floor windows a high parapet steps up at each end and in the center. The building's enrichment is achieved by slightly projecting and recessed wall surfaces and by limestone accents at the second floor window sills and a parapet coping.

The small, one-story structure at 523 Indiana Avenue (photo 9) is a simple, single storefront now boarded. Its roofline is stepped up slightly in the center.

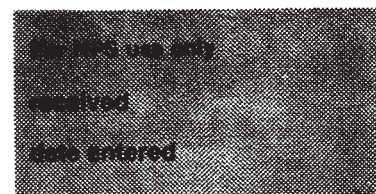
The building at 506-508 Indiana Avenue (photo 16) is the only structure in this nomination to have had its original appearance significantly changed. The two-story structure was originally built c. 1879. About 1940 the upper facade was sheathed with white Lustron panels. In the process, the second floor windows were reduced in size and aluminum sash substituted for the original. The storefronts are now covered by a roll-up metal security wall. This building has recently been sold and the new owner plans to remove the Lustron panels.

The Indiana Avenue Historic District contains 11 contributing buildings and one non-contributing building. It contains no contributing or non-contributing sites, structures or objects.



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National Park Service

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By the late 1890s the City Directory reveals such establishments as the black-owned Seaton & Vanderwood Restaurant at 526 Indiana Avenue (photo 8), located adjacent to the immigrant-owned second-hand clothing store at 524 Indiana Avenue established by Nathan Yankuner. The restaurant existed until 1911; the clothing store operated until c. 1905.

The building at 537-39 (photo 10) was likewise the site of black-owned businesses during the 1880s. From 1886-87 Henry Seaton operated a saloon at 537 Indiana Avenue, while in 1888 John J. Thornton established one of the earliest undertaking establishments in the district at 539.

In 1920 Nelda Weathers wrote in a thesis on black housing conditions in the city, "Indianapolis does not have segregation theoretically, but practically she does."<sup>4</sup> Because of this de facto segregation, the businesses located along Indiana Avenue catered to the black population and thus served to give the community a more individual identity. The Indiana Avenue of the 1920s provided goods and services for blacks not admitted to downtown stores. The cultural identity created by segregation led to the Harlem-Renaissance atmosphere of the area.

The majority of jazz clubs most commonly associated with the avenue were located in the 400 block; however, several clubs and theaters were operated within the 500 block. The international recognition Indiana Avenue received due to its concentration of jazz night clubs brought people--black and white-- to the area. Duncan Schiedt, author of The Jazz State of Indiana, wrote:

For many years Indiana had a black and tan character. In its own way it duplicated the situation in New York's Harlem, where the well-to-do traveled to observe the great black bands and entertainers in action on their own turf.<sup>5</sup>

The avenue was dubbed such names as "Funky Broadway," "The Yellow Brick Road," and "The Grant 01' Street."

The major theater on the block, since demolished, was the Washington, formerly the Crown Garden. This building was located at 521 Indiana Avenue. During the theater's years of operation from 1916 until 1928 such famed black entertainers as Ethel Waters, Bessie Smith, The Whitman Sisters, and Buck & Bubbles appeared. The only theater building which exists today is that of the Columbia Theater, 524 Indiana Avenue (photo 8). This theater likewise contributed to the cultural identity associated with the Avenue by being the first movie theater in the city to show a film with an all black cast.<sup>6</sup> The Columbia remained at 524 Indiana Avenue from 1911-18. 524 Indiana Avenue, along with the Walker Theater at 617 Indiana Avenue (National Register 1980), exist as the only reminders of the numerous jazz clubs and theaters which once thrived along the Avenue.

The office of the Indianapolis Recorder was also located within the 500 block of Indiana Avenue. The newspaper, established in 1895, is the third oldest black newspaper in the United States.<sup>7</sup> Its offices remained at 518 Indiana Avenue (demolished) from 1920 to 1975, when they moved to 2901 North Tacoma Avenue. Since The Recorder's establishment, the paper has been owned and operated by the Stewart family.

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One building which has remained in operation to the present despite the large number of vacancies which surround it is 547-551 Indiana Avenue (photos 11, 12). Built in 1882, the structure has remained either a saloon or liquor store the majority of its existence. Currently in operation as the Imperial Lounge, 551 Indiana Avenue served originally as the saloon of William Hindel from 1882-1894. From 1882 to 1926 the saloon changed ownership several times. During prohibition (1920-33) the building housed such establishments as a chili parlor, billiards hall, and soft drink bar. Then, from 1935 to c. 1940, the building housed a pharmacy. The building returned to its original use as a saloon and liquor store in 1945 and has remained so since.

Architecturally, the 500 block of Indiana Avenue provides good examples of the Italianate and functional styles. The structures at 522-526, 527-525, and 535 Indiana Avenue are typical examples of Italianate architecture. "This was by far the most dominant style for commercial buildings of Indiana throughout the late 19th century."<sup>8</sup> Each building possesses characteristics such as brackets at the cornice line and round-arched windows with keystones and springers. The structure at 527-525 has elaborately detailed keystones and springers with a floral pattern. Similarly, the building at 547-551 Indiana Avenue has several elements of the Italianate style within its angular design. Like the previous three examples, it has brackets at the cornice and its radiating voussoir brick headers are also an Italianate design.

The Ferger Building at 502-504 Indiana Avenue (1909) is an example of the later architecture visible within the block. Its simplistic geometric styling nicely incorporates classic architectural elements such as limestone headers and keystones and the brick quoins located at the point of the building.

Buildings at 547-551 and 502-504 Indiana Avenue are important structures to the City of Indianapolis because of their angular design. Until July, 1986, the 500 block of Indiana Avenue possessed three flat iron influenced structures--the largest concentration in the city. Today, 547-551 and 502-504 are the remaining two in the block. This angular style, once common in Indianapolis due to the diagonally cut streets, is a rapidly disappearing design. These two structures provide important representations of this angular styling which so effectively utilizes the points formed by the intersecting diagonal streets.

The 500 block of Indiana exists as an important part of the Midtown area. Its remaining significant buildings provide representations of the typical commercial structures which once dominated the street. The block is the sole remnant of the once numerous services and entertainment facilities which helped to give this predominantly black area a specific identity.

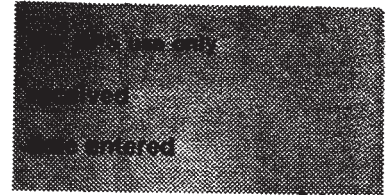
NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Steve Hall and Wanda Bryant, "A Stream of Hopes, of Dreams, of Promise," Indianapolis News, 28 June 1982, n.p.

<sup>2</sup>Ida W. Bryant, Glimpses of the Negro in Indianapolis -- 1863-1963. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, n.d.) p. 1.

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<sup>3</sup>Hall.

<sup>4</sup>Nelda A. Weathers, "How the Negro Lives in Indianapolis," M.A. thesis, Indiana University, 1924, p. 7.

<sup>5</sup>Duncan P. Schiedt, The Jazz State of Indiana (Pittsboro: Duncan P. Schiedt, 1977) p. 183.

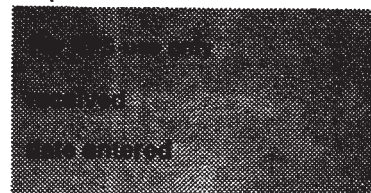
<sup>6</sup>The Saint, "History of Famous Indiana Avenue," Indianapolis Recorder, 1 February 1947, p. 15.

<sup>7</sup>Telephone Interview with Huston Rogers, Recorder, 11 August 1986.

<sup>8</sup>Victorian Commercial Architecture in Indiana, ed. Jan Finney (Indianapolis: Historic Landmarks Foundation of Indiana, 1978), p. 4.

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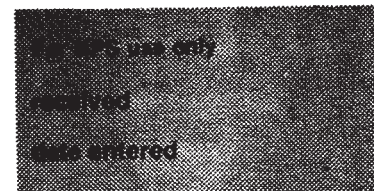
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The boundaries of the Indiana Avenue Historic District were drawn to include all those remaining commercial structures facing the avenue and to exclude those parcels in the 500 block now vacant as a result of demolition. Parcel #6 (see Map I: Square No. 10) was left in although vacant because of its location between the two groups of contributing structures. The Second Baptist Church, 422 West Michigan Street (Parcel #10 on Map I) was excluded because the building, though used as a black church, was felt not to contribute to the commercial significance of the district. The church, built in 1912, has been substantially altered from its original appearance.

Beginning at the intersection of the north side of Michigan Street and the south side of Indiana Avenue, the boundary runs west 84 feet to the west property line of 506-508 Indiana Avenue;

thence north along that line for 33 feet, where it points northwest and runs along a line parallel with Indiana Avenue for 39½ feet; thence west along the south property line of 516-520 Indiana Avenue; thence north, following the west property line of 516-520 Indiana Avenue.

At the intersection with the south property line of 522-526 Indiana Avenue, the boundary runs west to the east side of West Street; thence north 104½ feet to the intersection with the north property line of 528-530 Indiana Avenue; thence east, following that property line to its intersection with the south side of Indiana Avenue.

The boundary then crosses Indiana Avenue to a point where the south property line of 543 Indiana Avenue intersects with the north side of Indiana Avenue; thence northwest, following the north side of Indiana Avenue to its intersection with the south side of North Street;

thence east, running 108 feet along this line to the intersection of the east property line of 437 North Street.

At this point it turns southeast and runs 39½ feet along the east property line of 437 North Street; thence angling more to the southeast and running for 74 feet along a line parallel to Indiana Avenue; thence south along the west property line of 419 North Street; thence east, following the south property line of 419 North Street to the point where it intersects with the north-south alley running midway between Missouri Street and Indiana Avenue.

The boundary then runs south along the west side of the alley to the south side of the east-west alley running midway between North Street and Indiana Avenue; thence east, following the south side of that alley to its intersection with Missouri Street.

At this point the boundary turns south and runs along the west side of Missouri Street for 69 feet to the south property line of 523 Indiana Avenue to its intersection with the avenue right-of-way; thence across Indiana Avenue to a point directly opposite on the south side of the street.

The boundary then turns southeast, running along the south side of Indiana Avenue to the intersection with the north side of Michigan Street, the point of beginning.

MAP I

